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WEEKLY REPORT



THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

3 March 1965

**INTELLIGENCE AND REPORTING SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE INTERAGENCY
VIETNAM COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

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THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM
(25 February-3 March 1965)

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THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

The emergence of peace movements in Buddhist and other civilian circles occupied increasing attention during the week. After a series of statements by leading Buddhist monks on the theme of peace, a small student demonstration in Saigon calling for an end to the war, and the arrest of certain politicians who sponsored a peace petition signed by 300 civil servants, Quat's cabinet met to take a stand on the issue. On 1 March, Quat issued a statement declaring his government opposed to any negotiated peace until the Communists ceased infiltration from North Vietnam and ended subversion in the South.

Although the government has warned that it will curb propaganda from Communist-inspired groups, it has distinguished between such groups and the aims of the Buddhists.

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there is a common theme in the remarks of various Buddhist leaders concerning a return to the "relative calm" of 1955. Although they have not so far echoed Communist terms for a settlement, their new emphasis on peace lends itself to Communist exploitation. The Buddhists may also use the peace campaign as a political lever on the Quat government or on the military.

A continuing series of command changes within the armed forces reflects the efforts of various generals to step into the strongman role vacated by General Khanh. General Thi, the commander in the northern provinces, who has so far dictated most of the changes, reportedly has also sent Premier Quat a letter recommending a similar "purification" of the civilian side of the government.

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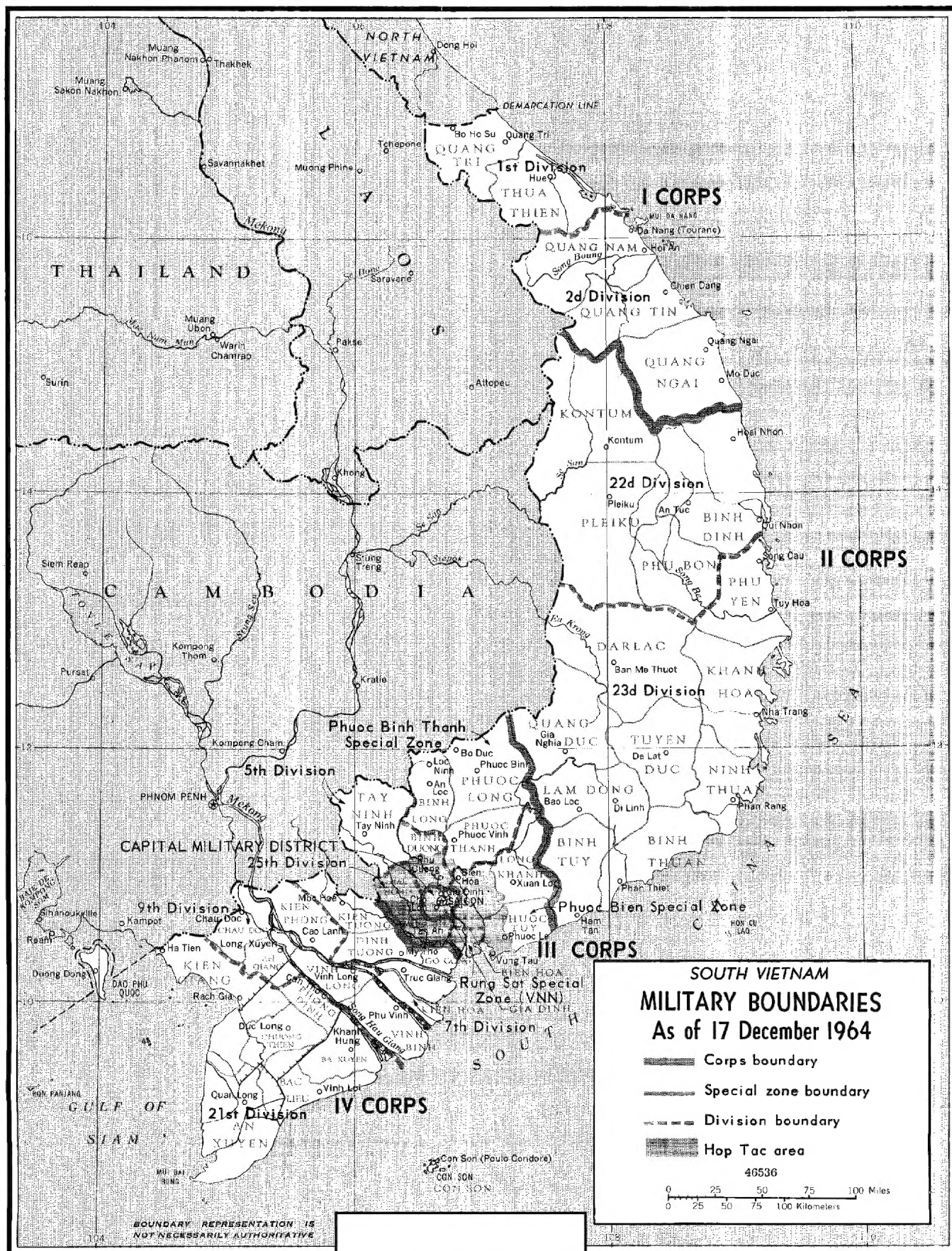
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The Viet Cong are continuing to make significant gains in the northern and central provinces of South Vietnam, particularly along the low coastal regions. Viet Cong effectiveness in Binh Dinh Province was manifested in their ability to isolate the coastal districts and to restrict government control to all but the district towns and heavily populated areas. Viet Cong efforts in Binh Dinh were mirrored in the neighboring coastal provinces of Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa but were less intense. The government is clearly on the defensive in the north and has been unable to contain, much less reverse, Communist gains. It seems likely that the Viet Cong will increase the pressure still more in the north, principally through continued small-scale attacks, harassments and acts of terrorism. Moreover, the Viet Cong retain and appear to be improving their capability for multiple battalion-size attacks against major lucrative targets in all areas.

Pacification remains stalled and further deterioration of rural security is expected.

The US Embassy reports that growing involvement of US directly in the war in South Vietnam, including use of US jets, coming on top of strikes against the North, has tended to offset the psychological effects of deteriorating security to some degree, but that, unfortunately, many Vietnamese seem to welcome increased US participation as an opportunity for reducing Vietnamese responsibility for the war effort.

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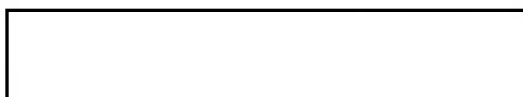
I. SITUATION WITHIN SOUTH VIETNAM

A. POLITICAL SITUATION

1. Political maneuvering by generals eager to step into the role vacated by General Khanh continued without resolution last week amid indications of a developing emphasis in certain civilian circles on the subject of peace in Vietnam. Premier Quat's cabinet met on 26 February to discuss the peace movements, and on 1 March Quat issued a statement publicly proclaiming that his government opposed any peaceful settlement except on conditions that the Communists end infiltration from North Vietnam and cease subversion and sabotage inside South Vietnam.

2. The degree of interrelationship between the calls for peace issued by various leading monks in the Buddhist hierarchy, by students, and by civilian politicians, as well as the extent to which these new campaigns are responsive to Viet Cong direction are still unclear. A group calling itself the "Movement for the People's Self-Determination" (MPSD), headed by three or four prominent politicians not in the government, has been labeled as Communist-inspired by government authorities. The government temporarily arrested some of its leaders when they attempted to hold a news conference, which allegedly had been approved by Armed Forces Council strongman General Thi. One such civilian leader, Nguyen Long, reportedly was found to possess pro-Communist documents.


3. Premier Quat has been careful, under press questioning, to distinguish between the MPSD and a similar movement led by Quang Lien, a US-educated monk holding secondary rank in the Buddhist hierarchy. Quat observed that Lien's movement, and statements by Thich Tam Chau--head of the Institute--on 23 February had not, like the MPSD, called for a cease-fire which could lead to an early Communist takeover. Lien told US embassy officers that he had discussed his movement with Long's group, but that the two

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had no connections, nor had the Buddhists instigated a peaceful demonstration on 26 February by about 100 students in Saigon calling for an end to the war. Lien, who said his movement did not have official sanction from the entire Buddhist hierarchy, said he was prepared, if the government approved, to negotiate with North Vietnam for an end to the war, but not with the Viet Cong Liberation Front, which would give the Front legal status. He said he was proposing that the Front disband and withdraw to North Vietnam, so that American forces could then be withdrawn. Lien argued that if the Viet Cong refused, they would then be exposed as aggressors and the South Vietnamese could more clearly unite to drive them out. He did little, however, to dispel the impression that his proposals have anti-American overtones, and on 2 March, in outlining these views to the press, observed that fighting between Vietnamese benefits only "foreign bosses." The government has vetoed Lien's proposal to contact North Vietnam.

4. Thich Tam Chau, apparently asked by Premier Quat to clarify his remarks of 23 February, did not endorse Lien's movement, but said he has asked Buddhists to pray for peace, and indicated that he had in mind a return to the situation of 1955 in which Communists would go to North Vietnam and "free nationalists" reside in the South. Another second-ranking monk, Ho Giac, made a speech on 27 February also sounding the theme of peace and also referring unfavorably to the role of "foreigners".



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6. Although it appears that there are some tactical differences among Buddhist leaders, possibly mirroring internal rivalries between the Chau and Quang factions--and with the former possibly willing to deal with more unsavory political elements, there does appear to be a rather consistent theme among them, including a belief that there is considerable public sentiment for ending the war. It is not yet clear whether they hope to channel such sentiment toward an acceptable settlement of the war, or whether this is the opening phase of a campaign which may move closer to Communist terms. There is some hint that the peace theme may become a yardstick against which Buddhist support for the Quat government will be measured, as well as a possibility that the Communists themselves may be able to influence the direction the campaign takes regardless of Buddhist intentions.

7. General Ky, commander of the air force, who reportedly has sought to have the Armed Forces Council take a stand on the developing peace movements, has issued a statement on his own denouncing them and advocating that persons "who work for the Communists" be shot by way of example. Ky and the Armed Forces Council, meanwhile, have cooperated with efforts, apparently spearheaded by General Thi to purge the military of "old guard" remnants, covering supporters of Diem, General Khanh, the

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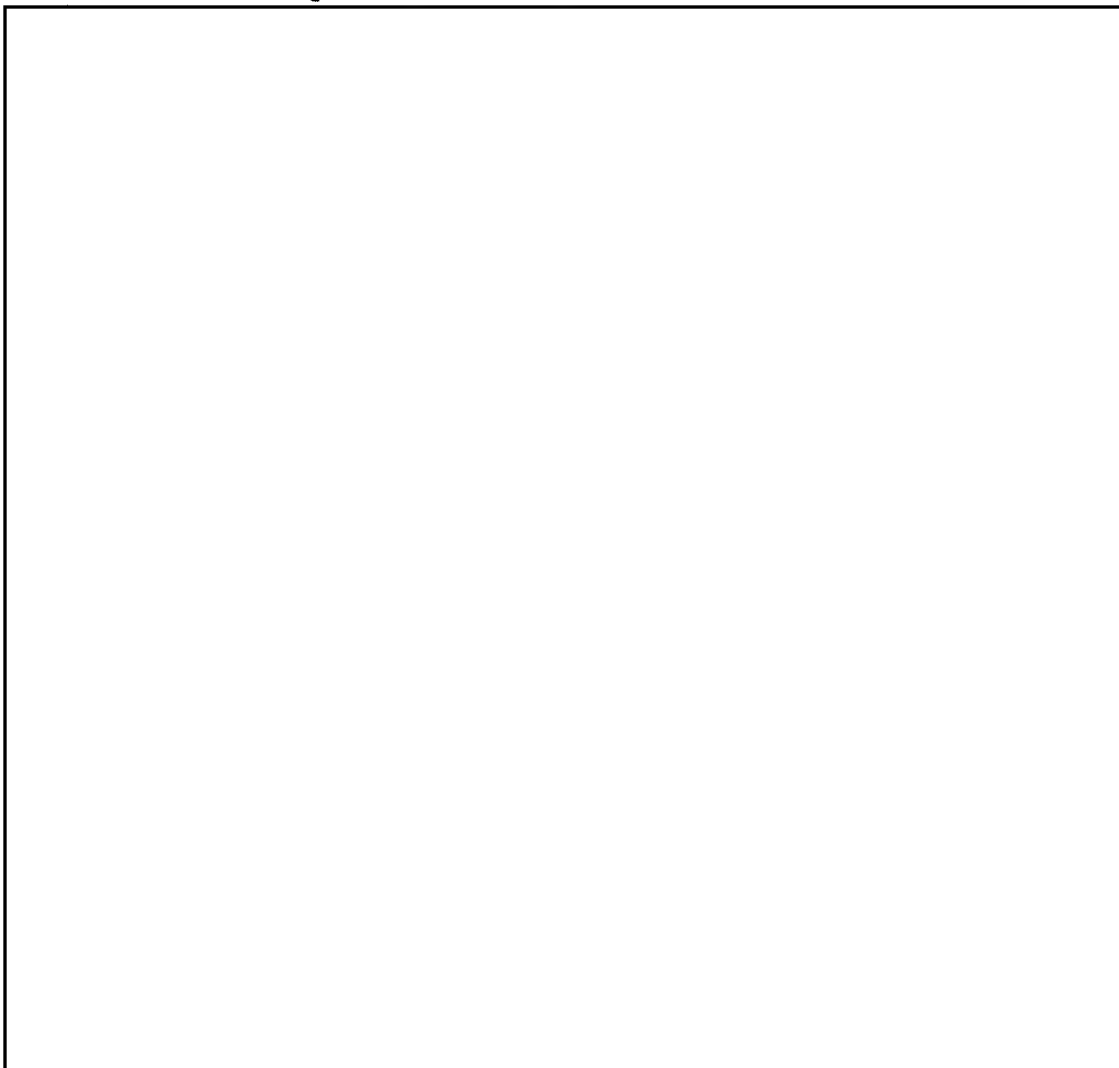
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19 February coup group, and officers either identified as corrupt or as anathema to the Buddhists.

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9. Behind the formal military appointments to date, including the reported appointment of General Thi--vice-premier and defense minister--as secretary-general of the Armed Forces Council, it appears likely that a struggle among the generals to fill Khanh's position is still in process.

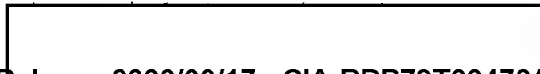
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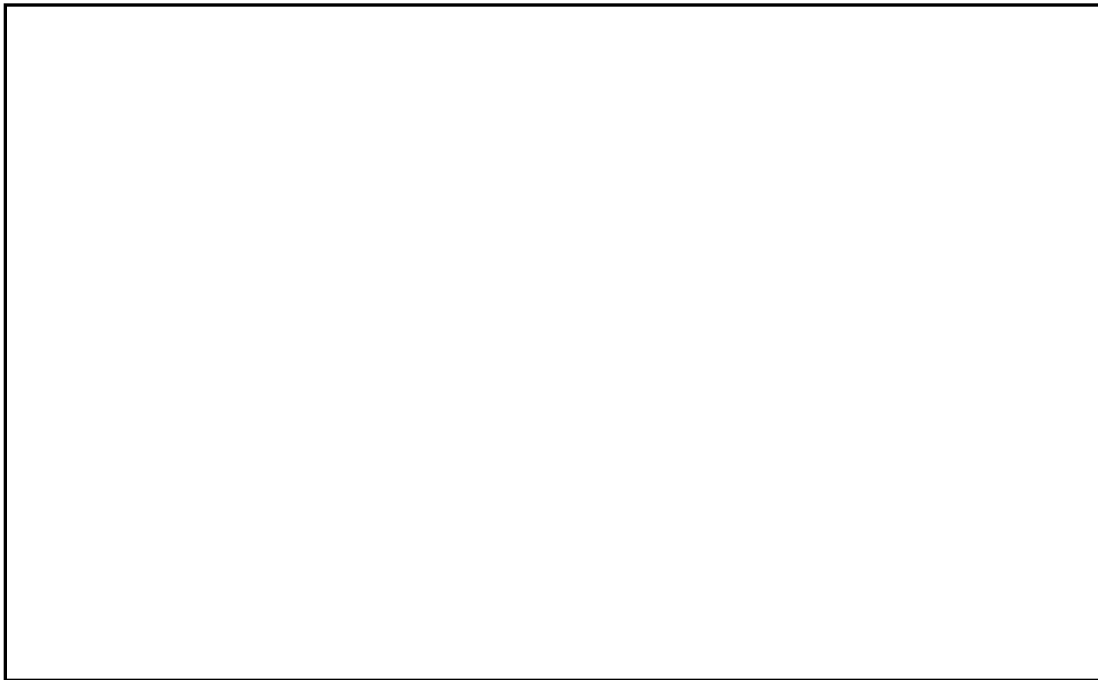
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11. Premier Quat is now considering naming General Khanh, who has arrived in the US on 2 March after stop-offs in Hong Kong and Rome, as ambassador to the US in place of Khiem. Quat recently told Ambassador Taylor that he intended to test Khiem's evident involvement in the abortive coup by summoning home chiefs of mission, and relieving Khiem if he refused to return.



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Economic Conditions

12. During January, the money supply increased by 13 percent over December, the largest monthly increase ever and 31 percent higher than a year ago--primarily because of an increase in GVN borrowing. The new cabinet has yet to focus on the rice problem or to send a letter formally requesting additional P.L. 480 rice.



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B. MILITARY SITUATION

1. Continued Communist gains are reflected again this week by the accelerating pace of rural insecurity, particularly in the II Corps area. The Communist offensive appears to be gaining momentum in the northern provinces, while to the south, the Viet Cong appear to be consolidating their forces and harassing government outposts.

During the week of 20-27 February, the VC concentrated their intensified campaign against posts, hamlets, and district towns. The momentum of these small-scale attacks and acts of terrorism has steadily increased indicating a determined enemy effort to undermine the morale of the civilian populace and to reduce the military capabilities of the Regional and Popular Forces, the mainstay of the government's pacification program.

In central Vietnam, the Viet Cong maintained the pace of the insurgency they initiated at the end of Tet. This has resulted in further deterioration of rural security, particularly in II Corps. The coastal districts of Binh Dinh have been effectively isolated and the government has been denied free access to all areas except district towns and heavily populated areas. There are indications that the Communists are making their presence felt in the provinces of Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa where two battalions are believed operating, and in the Binh Tuy/Binh Thuan areas, where three more enemy battalions may now be ready to start operations. Additionally, in Kontum Province, unconfirmed reports indicate the presence of at least three main force battalions there. The Viet Cong are operating throughout II Corps with relative impunity, picking off small units of the regular and paramilitary forces. Enemy ambushes have become frequent and the Viet Cong are able to interdict all land lines of communications at will.

Route 19 from Pleiku to Qui Nhon has been effectively blocked by a probable main force battalion, and Route 14, both to the north and south of Kontum City, has become extremely vulnerable to enemy interdiction efforts. Route 1 continues to receive the

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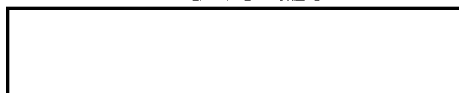
greater amount of Viet Cong attention, which has caused a large portion of the highway to be closed. Highway bridges were apparently the main Viet Cong targets for sabotage with at least 12 destroyed or heavily damaged during the past week.

Contributing to the consolidation of Viet Cong gains has been the continuing disruption to lines of communication, particularly railways. Sabotage to railroad facilities increased somewhat and was especially evident along the coastal route in the I and II Corps areas. At least five bridges were destroyed or heavily damaged. Taken collectively, the total effect of Viet Cong rail sabotage during the week has seriously curtailed traffic. Continued harassment of repair efforts will extend the curtailment of rail service. The situation in the northernmost I Corps is little better and the Viet Cong drive to establish their presence in the coastal areas continues.

Viet Cong activity in III Corps increased somewhat but continues at a relatively low intensity. The enemy confine themselves to harassments and the use of heavy weapons to shell posts and population centers. The Viet Cong, however, still have ample forces in III Corps which can be brought to bear when and if they choose. In the Capital Military District, Viet Cong activity increased sharply last week. In the southerly IV Corps Zone, enemy activity was heaviest during the past week, taking the form of the harassment of posts and district towns, sabotage, and small-scale attacks. There was a noticeable absence of direct confrontation with ARVN in IV Corps which could indicate that the Viet Cong may have suffered heavy losses in recent engagements. They may be undertaking to rebuild their forces while attempting to destroy the effectiveness of the government's paramilitary forces in the delta. Strong Viet Cong presence throughout the IV Corps area, however, appears to have balanced government efforts to extend their influence into the delta. From the pattern and level of activities in the delta, it appears that the Viet Cong may be conducting a holding type of action there while they concentrate on their offensive in the central and northern provinces of South Vietnam.

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2. Government military operations increased only slightly but the number of large unit contacts with the Viet Cong contacts decreased. Notwithstanding the upward statistical trend, COMUSMACV reports that, at least in II Corps, government operations were not conducted aggressively and commanders were extremely cautious.

The first of two significant operations took place in southwestern Binh Dinh Province where a well-trained Viet Cong main force battalion severely mauled government units who were committed to battle piecemeal. In support of this engagement, US jet aircraft attacks on enemy positions facilitated extraction of a portion of the trapped friendly force. In their first encounter with jet aircraft, the Viet Cong apparently stood their ground and returned an inaccurate but intense volume of small arms and automatic weapons fire. Incomplete reports indicate friendly losses were 43 killed, 72 wounded and 58 missing. Communist losses are unknown. In Binh Dinh, a portion of a large composite government force ran into a Viet Cong battalion-size ambush. Relieving units were also ambushed separately along the highway. Aggressive counteraction, however, prevented excessive losses; reported casualties were 10 killed, nine wounded, and 58 missing. No enemy casualties were reported. The largest heliborne assault of the war was mounted this week in Phuoc Tuy Province against light enemy ground fire; the operation continues with results so far reported.

Preliminary post-strike intelligence has not yet determined the extent to which recent intensified air strikes have hurt the Viet Cong. US in-country jet strikes were flown for the first time on 19 February and on seven subsequent days against Viet Cong bivouac, training, operational and rest areas, troop concentrations, structures, and routes of communications. In Phuoc Tuy Province, a total of 154 sorties were flown expending general purpose bombs some with delay fusing napalm and fragmentation ordnance. Results of the air strikes were inconclusive although COMUSMACV reports that there is some slight evidence that the strikes may have forestalled an attack on Xuyen Moc, a district capital in eastern Phuoc Tuy

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Province, and possibly caused at least a partial Viet Cong withdrawal from the area. Reportedly, the local populace was in high spirits because of the strikes. Friendly ground operations are presently underway in the general area of the strikes. In Pleiku Province, a total of 23 sorties were flown against a concentration of 300 Viet Cong. Unconfirmed reports indicate 40 Viet Cong bodies along with an unknown number of damaged weapons left in the area. Inaccessibility of areas struck, dense jungle canopy, and the brief time since initiation of the air strikes accounts for the paucity of post-strike intelligence. COMUSMACV states that preliminary analysis of post-strike aerial photography indicates that target coverage was more thorough than would have been the case with conventional aircraft.

Naval action was marked by the discovery in Kien Hoa Province of a 60-70 foot wooden boat, a type that abounds on the Mekong River. The vessel reportedly was camouflaged and investigating aircraft drew ground fire. A subsequent air strike sank the vessel in shallow water. While the craft may have been carrying war material, there seems to be no reason to suspect this particular vessel as opposed to others. The adjacent village was in a Viet Cong base area of long-standing which no government military unit has penetrated for the past two years.

3. The greater intensity of the war is reflected in higher government losses this week. ARVN casualties rose to 1,205 (294 KIA) from 893 (224 KIA) the previous week. Viet Cong casualties declined to 452 (364 KIA) from 481 (424 KIA). Government weapon losses rose sharply to 718 from 348 the previous week. Viet Cong weapon losses declined to 150 from 172 last week. (Viet Cong weapon losses do not reflect the 4,000-odd weapons captured in Phu Yen Province last week.)

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C. PACIFICATION

1. Pacification as a nationwide effort remained stalled. Further deterioration in the security situation in I and II corps areas resulted from a slackening of the pacification effort. The only tangible pacification activity was in the high-priority Hop Tac effort around Saigon.

2. Ambassador Taylor has called the attention of the Quat government to US field adviser reports which in November indicated satisfactory progress in pacification in 17 of the 45 provinces, in December in 10 provinces, and in January in only eight provinces. The deterioration is attributed to growing Viet Cong strength and sabotage activity, and political instability including urban disturbances. Premier Quat now states that his government is "rethinking" pacification organization and procedures, including mobilization, and that he may replace at least his interior minister, who is not adequate for the job.

3. The security situation in the five coastal provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, and Phu Yen has deteriorated to a point that government efforts there will be largely restricted to areas close to the province capitals. Refugee relief programs rather than pacification per se will be the main concern in these provinces for the immediate future.

4. In I Corps zone, the main thrust of the pacification plan for 1965 was to maintain the security of Route 1 as a safe route of communication, but the Viet Cong continue to sabotage it at will. The commander of the 1st Division plans to forcibly relocate some 1,300 families who are known to be Viet Cong sympathizers from the foothills west of Route 1 presumably to a less sensitive area. However, US advisers have cautioned against the implementation of this plan because of possible adverse effects of forcible relocation.

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5. Viet Cong activities have forced a further curtailment of the pacification effort in II Corps zone here. Government units continue to be mainly committed to defensive missions rather than to clearing and securing operations.

In Binh Dinh Province, as of 25 February, 56,000 people who have fled from the Viet Cong are living in 31 refugee centers. The majority of these people have come from two northern districts of the province or from two of its westernmost districts.

6. In III Corps, outside of the Hop Tac area, pacification efforts have largely stopped. Further disillusionment with the central government has been generated among the people of this corps zone due to the unstable political situation in Saigon and the shifting of key personnel.

7. In the IV Corps zone, the pacification program remains stalled except for development activities among the people in GVN-controlled areas. The Viet Cong have successfully managed to stop the expansion of what "oil-spots" there are established in the zone.

8. The Hop Tac program continues despite the political unrest of 19-21 February which involved units and officials committed to the pacification effort. However, personnel changes, accomplished and anticipated, may retard the future success of this effort.

During the past week, 13 more hamlets were added to the "completed" list, bring the total to 322. Some 870,000 people are now reckoned to be living in secured areas, while some 448,000 are in areas considered to be in the securing phase of the pacification process.

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II. THIRD COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS

A. KOREA

Six hundred South Korean troops, the first contingent of a 2,000-man force expected to be sent to South Vietnam within the next thirty days, arrived in Saigon on 25 February aboard three LSTs escorted by two Korean destroyers. Top GVN leaders, including Premier Quat, attended the arrival ceremonies. The Koreans made an excellent impression, being obviously a high quality, hand-picked group. After setting up their own encampment in Bien Hoa Province, they are scheduled to begin road building operations in the Saigon area. The local Vietnamese press enthusiastically welcomed the Korean contingent as further evidence of international commitments to the freedom of South Vietnam. South Vietnamese police were reportedly placed on alert for possible pro-neutralist demonstrations protesting the arrival; however, the demonstrations apparently did not materialize.

B. CAMBODIA

The plenary session of Sihanouk's "Indochinese People's Conference" opened on 1 March. Originally scheduled for 25 February, the plenary session was delayed by disagreement between the "neutralists" (Tran Van Huu's expatriated South Vietnamese delegation, the Kampuchea Krom or the ethnic Cambodians in South Vietnam, and the Sangkum) and, on the other, the Communists (the Viet Cong Liberation Front, the DRV Fatherland Front, and the Pathet Lao) who had attended the preparatory meetings.

In the interim between the preparatory and plenary sessions of the conference, Sihanouk published, for the historical record, his planned introductory address to the conference. His statement called for true neutralization of Laos and South Vietnam through the withdrawal of the military influences

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of both East and West, and for supervision by an expanded and strengthened International Control Commission to be financed by the "Western Imperialists." He also proposed the formation of a "League of Indochinese States" and warned that, if the resolutions adopted by conference were unworkable, Cambodia would withdraw from the conference and dissociate itself from its resolutions.

The brief statement which Sihanouk actually delivered to the plenary session was limited to eulogizing the "dead and tortured heroes of the struggle against imperialism" and attacking American policy in Southeast Asia. All opening addresses thus far received--from Communist-controlled organizations in North and South Vietnam and Laos--have echoes this line. President Sukarno, self-invited to Cambodia at this time, is to address the conference on March 4. Thus far it appears that Sihanouk, by scrapping his planned address, may have lost and the Communist elements of Indochina may have gained the controlling voice in the conference.

C. ICC

The Chief of the South Vietnamese Liaison Mission to the ICC stated that at the present time the South Vietnamese Government will not request withdrawal of the fixed ICC teams in South Vietnam, in contrast to Hanoi's action on the fixed teams in North Vietnam. He also stated that the GVN will protest the North Vietnamese action.

D. U THANT

On 24 February, United Nations Secretary General U Thant stated at a press conference his support for political and diplomatic negotiations to resolve the Vietnamese situation. The Secretary General also stated that he had presented

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proposals to the principal parties involved in Vietnamese crisis.

E. INDIA

Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri told the Indian Parliament on March 2 that he was awaiting a "final reply" from both the United States and the Soviet Union to his proposal for a Geneva-type conference on Vietnam. Shastri had suggested such a conference early last month.

F. FRANCE

In briefing an American embassy official on French discussions with the Russians on Vietnam, a French foreign ministry official stated that the USSR had required a prior condition to convening of Geneva conference, the cessation of US operations against North Vietnam. He said, however, that the French were opposed to prior conditions and, if the Russians would agree to dropping prior conditions, the French Government would act in concert with Russia to restore peace in the area.

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III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLOC

Communist propaganda reaction to the 2 March airstrike was relatively slow and initially limited to reportorial accounts. Moscow characterized the airstrikes as "barbaric" and warned that they made the situation in Indochina even more acute. Peiping gave the strikes front page coverage, but issued no authoritative commentary. Hanoi's Nhan Dan on 3 March dismissed the raids as having created "no appreciable losses" and threatened no new countermeasures. Nhan Dan repeated earlier promises to meet all US attacks with "thunderlike blows."

The recent step-up in direct US military participation in the war has been sharply attacked in the Communist world. Peiping on 1 March charged that US policy is designed to force the "South Vietnamese people" to agree to US peace terms and that "certain people" (clearly implying the leadership of the USSR) are cooperating with US attempts to get the Communists to back down. The editorial boasted that the Chinese will "never succumb to US imperialist blackmail" and repeated earlier demands for complete US withdrawal from Vietnam. Hanoi also took this position in its Nhan Dan editorial of 3 March, stating that the US was mistaken if it thought their new air-war would lead to negotiations.

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In his television speech on the 26th, Kosygin indicated that the military equipment promised in his recent trip to Hanoi was now on its way. On the subject of a conference, Kosygin was evasive saying only that his government would have to act in concert with the DRV.

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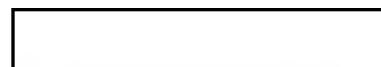
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